

Rezensionen – Comptes rendus – Reviews

Hayes, Anna/Clarke, Michael (eds.): *Inside Xinjiang. Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest*. Routledge Contemporary China Series. London and New York: Routledge, 2016, 267 pp., ISBN 978-1-138-78079-8.

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2017-0069>

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, many publications in the field of Xinjiang studies have focused on the consequences that the new political ordering of nation states in Central Asia has exerted upon inter-ethnic relations and on the geopolitical situation of this region. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, located in northwest China, is the largest province of the People's Republic of China and connects the country territorially to Central Asia. Its geostrategic position was recently strengthened through the Chinese central government's proclamation of the "One Belt, One Road" (一带一路) initiative. This large-scale development plan aspires to create a New Silk Road, mainly through investments in transport and trade infrastructures across Chinese frontiers. Analysed from an 'outside-in' perspective, Xinjiang is of the utmost importance for the Chinese state, in terms of its strategic territorial position, which is further linked to a rich availability of natural resources. In recent years, however, the regular occurrence of violent inter-ethnic incidents between the Muslim, Turkic-speaking Uyghur and Han Chinese parts of the population have resulted in an unease in the everyday lives of the population.

The anthology *Inside Xinjiang. Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest*, edited by Anna Hayes and Michael Clarke, successfully complements the geopolitical 'outside-in' view of this contested area with diverse 'inside-out' perspectives that highlight the internal dynamics of space, place and power, especially concerning ethnic relations between Han and non-Han ethnic groups within the region. These grassroots perceptions offer a valuable counterpart to the political analyses that have predominated in Xinjiang studies, especially since the proclamation of the New Silk Road strategy. The volume aims to analyse "[...] the factors that contributed to Xinjiang's transition from the frontier *par excellence* throughout Chinese history into the contemporary 'integral' province of the PRC [...]", with a particular focus on "[...] the political, economic and social interactions among and between the non-Han and Han peoples of the region" (p. 1). The volume successfully achieves this by revealing different

perspectives on everyday social and ethnic realities in Xinjiang, providing inspiration for researchers interested in topics like rural and urban differences, Uyghur and Han identity processes, social stratification, health and education issues, as well as media and museum representations in Xinjiang.

Twelve years after Frederick Starr's anthology *Xinjiang. China's Muslim Borderland*,¹ which became one of the best-known publications in the field, Hayes and Clarke bring together a number of well-established Xinjiang scholars from different disciplines including Chinese studies, history, security studies, anthropology, political sciences and sociology. This book provides new insights into many of the geopolitical issues raised in Starr's earlier volume, but includes the social and political developments of the last decade.

The two editors, as well as most of the authors, have gained a sound knowledge of the internal social dynamics in Xinjiang through extensive field-work periods or comprehensive qualitative data analysis. Anna Hayes is a senior lecturer in Humanities in the College of Arts, Society and Education at James Cook University. Having conducted research on HIV/AIDS in Xinjiang,² she is currently working on aspects of human security as well as tourist site representation.³ The co-editor, Michael Clarke, is Associate Professor at the National Security College of the Australian National University, and he has more than a decade of research experience in Xinjiang, with a particular focus on the region's history and politics. Clarke has published extensively on Xinjiang,⁴ including the monograph *Xinjiang and China's Rise in Central Asia*⁵ and a volume co-edited with Colin Mackerras: *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the twenty-first Century*.⁶

Starting from the research question "What is life like in China's 'new frontier'?" (p. 5), the book's contributions address a broad range of everyday life situations in Xinjiang. In chapter one, Ildikó Bellér-Hann examines the oral

1 Starr 2004.

2 Hayes 2012; Hayes/Qarluq 2011.

3 As well as her regional focus, Hayes has published on migration, security and the state, including the volume she co-edited with Niklaus Steiner and Robert Mason (2013): *Migration and Insecurity: Citizenship and Social Inclusion in a Transnational Era*.

4 Clarke's contributions to Xinjiang studies include numerous articles on policy, security, human rights and geopolitics published in journals such as *Middle East Policy*, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Asian Ethnicity* and *Asian Studies Review*.

5 Clarke 2011.

6 Mackerras/Clarke (eds.) 2009.

history among rural Uyghurs in the Kashgar region who narrate their memories about the government's forced land collectivisation in 1949, revealing how their shared view of the past strengthens the communal Uyghur identity of today.⁷ In chapter two, David O'Brien highlights internal diversities among the Han, showing that power issues are at play within ethnic groups – not only between them.⁸ In chapter three, Anna Hayes focuses on the official representation of ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Regional Museum in Ürümqi, where the different groups are described in detail in the Nationalities chamber but are not included as part of the other regional history exhibitions in the museum.⁹ In chapter four, Joanne Smith Finley unveils identity frictions in the words of the singer Dao Lang, a Han immigrant who creatively transforms local Uyghur songs into his own repertoire of fusion rock.¹⁰ In chapter five, Yangbin Chen analyses how Chinese state media take advantage of two prominent Uyghur portrayals (the peasant 'Uncle Kurban' and the migrant worker 'Brother Alim') to transmit the message that ethnic groups can live a multi-ethnic and harmonious coexistence in China.¹¹ In chapter six, James Leibold and Danielle Xiaodan Deng examine the impact of Xinjiang's highly-segregated residential areas on inter-ethnic relations through an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.¹² In chapter seven, Alessandra Cappelletti emphasises the bridging role of the Uyghur elite by exercising its power in between poor rural Uyghur farmers and the central government in Beijing.¹³ In chapter eight, Hankiz Ekpar demonstrates how structural differences between Han and Uyghur parts of society affect the vulnerability of adolescent Uyghurs to becoming infected with HIV/AIDS.¹⁴ In chapter nine, Timothy Grose discusses the challenges for well-educated young Uyghurs returning to their Muslim and Uyghur social environment in Xinjiang after eight or more years of university education in China proper.¹⁵ Finally, in chapter ten, Michael Clarke explores the different national and international geopolitical interests at stake, highlighting the importance of including everyday experiences in order to understand the geopolitical realities of the region.¹⁶

⁷ Chapter one by Bellér-Hann, pp. 15–31.

⁸ Chapter two by O'Brien, pp. 32–51.

⁹ Chapter three by Hayes, pp. 52–72.

¹⁰ Chapter four by Smith Finley, pp. 75–99.

¹¹ Chapter five by Chen, pp. 100–121.

¹² Chapter six by Leibold and Deng, pp. 122–148.

¹³ Chapter seven by Cappelletti, pp. 151–182.

¹⁴ Chapter eight by Ekpar, pp. 183–205.

¹⁵ Chapter nine by Grose, pp. 206–224.

¹⁶ Chapter ten by Clarke, pp. 225–259.

The editors have grouped the ten chapters into three main sections: ‘Identity formation and sense of belonging’; ‘Inter-ethnic relations in Xinjiang’; and ‘Government policies in the region and beyond’. However, most of the contributions would fit into several of these categories, since they all address issues of identity belongings, inter-ethnic relations and political power. All of the texts were written soon after the violent inter-ethnic riots in Ürümqi in 2009 when around 200 (mostly Han) people were killed. Most authors refer to the tense post-riot situation and to subsequent incidents like the Tiananmen Square attack in 2013, the deadly knife attack in Kunming (Yunnan province) in 2014, and smaller incidents which sporadically happen in different parts of Xinjiang. The government and official media ascribe these incidents to Uyghur separatists, which reinforces inter-ethnic hostilities. Despite large-scale economic investments and rigid military control, Xinjiang remains a place shaped by social conflicts which are partly related to its larger geopolitical setting.

When conducting research in Xinjiang, ethnicity and ethnic belongings are inherent parts of everyday lived realities. Choosing which residential area to buy an apartment in, which restaurant to eat dinner at with friends, or which supermarket to buy everyday products from, is always shaped by an ethnic performance based on people’s cultural and religious background, which determines where they prefer to locate themselves through these daily practices. Ethnic performance is a way to form places, as Basso explains: “Deliberately and otherwise, people are forever presenting each other with culturally mediated images of where and how they dwell. In large ways and small, they are forever performing acts that reproduce and express their own sense of place – and also, inextricably, their own understandings of who and what they are”.¹⁷ From my own fieldwork experiences in Xinjiang, I know that it is no exaggeration to state that social life in Xinjiang is divided predominantly by ethnicity. People constantly draw ethnic boundaries through their activities, and ethnicity is an integral part of public discourses – whether in the university campus, at local markets or in urban parks.

In this context, ethnicity also figures prominently in the book’s contributions. About half of the chapters discuss one ethnic group (either Han or Uyghur), while the other half focus on inter-ethnic negotiation in particular settings. Bellér-Hann, Cappelletti, Ekpar and Grose concentrate almost exclusively on Uyghur lifeworlds and provide insights into the daily challenges for this Muslim section of the population. The contributors address a broad range of identity issues and show how different parts of Uyghur society (e. g. farmers,

¹⁷ Basso 1996: 57.

élites, structurally-disadvantaged groups and highly-educated youth) deal with social and ethnic belongings. When reading the chapters, I appreciated the diversity of topics as well as the discussion of internal dynamics at play within the Uyghur population. On the other side, only O'Brien targets the large Han population living in Xinjiang, by meticulously revealing the intra-ethnic distinctions that various Han immigrants draw among themselves. This underrepresentation of studies on the Xinjiang Han is no surprise, but rather a structural feature permeating Xinjiang studies. Even if a number of Han-oriented studies have recently appeared,¹⁸ studies on the lives of ethnic minority groups would still predominate within studies about China's border regions. Compared to the chapters focusing on either one or the other ethnic group, those by Hayes, Smith Finley, Chen, Leibold and Deng, and Clarke discuss the negotiation of identities in specific surroundings (museum, music, media, residence and geopolitics). These chapters highlight interactions between Han and non-Han groups in particular settings where ethnicity becomes articulated or even exploited.

The book only reviews interactions between Han and Uyghur parts of the population, and omits those with other ethnic groups, such as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mongols or Tajik, who also form part of 'multi-ethnic' Xinjiang. This could be criticised as a shortcoming of the publication but, because the contributions are linked to the 'outside-in' perspective of the broader geopolitical context and through the predominant foci on urban areas (mainly Ürümqi and southern Xinjiang), it seems reasonable to focus on interactions between these two groups.

There is a lack of discussion about the region's close cultural connections to Central Asia throughout the volume, probably because it aims to present aspects of social life in this 'bordered' area of China. The borders between Xinjiang and Central Asian countries are strictly controlled and difficult to traverse but, especially because of the recent 'New Silk Road' intention to intensify economic relations, this connectedness to Central Asia in linguistic, religious, cultural and social terms could benefit from more prominence in the volume. Most contributions link Xinjiang to the rest of China, which is congruent with the approach previously taken in Starr's edited volume.¹⁹ However, Starr aimed to provide insights into a *remote* region of China, while this publication instead highlights the *linkages* with the rest of China. This becomes particularly apparent in the chapters covering different forms of Han immigration to Xinjiang (O'Brien);

¹⁸ For example, Joniak-Lüthi 2014 or Cliff 2016.

¹⁹ Starr 2004.

tourism and national representations in a museum (Hayes); singer Dao Lang's itinerant life between Sichuan, Ürümqi and Beijing and the spread of his interpretation of Xinjiang music all over China (Smith Finley); the shaping of a certain depiction of an Uyghur migrant worker, 'Alim', in recent state discourses on multi-ethnic national harmony (Chen); or the discrepancies between Xinjiang graduates' life in their university classrooms in eastern China and their families' expectations in Xinjiang (Grose).

As a researcher interested in analytical conceptualisations of 'space' and 'place', the book's title, *Inside Xinjiang. Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest*, led me to expect some introductory words about the spatial localisation and implications of the articles. However, only half of the ten-page introduction outlines the region's shift from a 'frontier' to a 'bordered' land and discusses Xinjiang's geopolitical setting, before moving on to an overview of the book's structure and chapter contents. A second edition might benefit from clarifying the linkages between the individual chapters with regard to space, place and power, as there is no explicit reference to these in the introduction. It seemed to me, when reading the book, that the common ground the chapters address are inter- and intra-ethnic relationships and identity constructions, rather than primarily space and place. This raises the question why the word 'ethnic' is missing from the book's title.

At the same time, 'power', which is part of the title, is omnipresent in all of the contributions. This not only includes the power of Chinese central government, which intervenes in everyday lives through policies or prohibitions, but also the power which is inherent within ethnic and social relations. O'Brien shows how ordinary Han residents criticised the lack of power that the (Han) government had to create stable living environments for the local population, following the violent incidents in 2009. The Han hostilities against the Uyghur are here heightened by resentment about the failure of authorities' power (pp. 42–43). Hayes explicitly discusses the power of institutions, in her case the power of a museum to shape common discourses about the region's history. She highlights the marginalisation of ethnic groups from official narratives: "This reinforces the anxious history of the region, because regional nationalities' history, and even the presence of minority nationalities in the region, is completely overshadowed by the dominant Han collective history and memory in Xinjiang" (p. 68). Another perspective on power – not as a top-down, but a bottom-up impetus – is provided by Leibold and Deng. The two authors mention that everyday practices can also have the power to change politics. For instance, as a result of inhabitants' practices of living in highly-segregated residential areas in Xinjiang, official institutions have now shifted their social work policy focus onto mitigating any further partition of society. The government

administration has responded to the implicit grassroots critique of current power structures and the organisation of society by segregated communities by strengthening programmes for “urban ethnic work” and “ethnic conflict management” (p. 143). Cappelletti provides another perspective on power relations, addressing the role of the Uyghur elite – who she asserts have even more power within Xinjiang than the central government in Beijing. In the context of development programmes for poor rural Uyghur farmers, local Uyghur authorities often profit financially by manipulating new land right regulations for their personal gain (pp. 173–174). These examples deconstruct the commonly-held assumption that power is entirely in the hands of central government, revealing that the power to change social circumstances can also emerge from everyday lived practices.

As well as these kinds of insights into different forms of power relations, the broad approaches to inter- and intra-ethnic variance taken in the different contributions are particularly enriching. In addition to the omnipresence of inter-ethnic boundary-making in everyday life in Xinjiang, the chapters also provide discussions of intra-ethnic variety in terms of social class. From my own experience, class cleavages are an important factor for explaining diversity within ethnic groups. For example, middle-class Uyghurs who can afford to buy an apartment adopt similar criteria to their Han counterparts in making their choice: an apartment has to be located in a pleasant neighbourhood and must provide a modern, green and internationalised urban lifestyle. They would only express their ethnic belonging in the internal decoration of their apartment, mainly through their choice of furniture or ornamental elements (like wood carvings or carpets). Thus, a person’s social status (including knowledge of Mandarin, frequent travel to eastern China or abroad, or membership of the Chinese Communist Party) can have a decisive impact on how they live out their ethnic identities in everyday life. The similar social lifestyles of Han and Uyghur middle-class residents shows that some inter-ethnic connections do exist, even if they are often not as pronounced as intra-ethnic cohesion or ethnic boundary-making. Cappelletti discusses the intra-ethnic class cleavages that are expressed in the divide between Uyghur elites and the Uyghur rural farmers who they refer to in derogatory terms whilst, in some ways, “exploit[ing]” them (p. 171). Here, we learn that class distinctions make a difference in terms of behaviour and the drawing of identity boundaries within an ethnic group. Similarly, O’Brien’s chapter on intra-Han differentiations clearly shows the intra-ethnic variety among Han immigrant groups. He indicates that many second- and third-generation Han citizens draw clear distinctions between themselves and recent Han immigrants. While they consider themselves “Xinjiang people”,

they classify recently-arrived migrants, in a sometimes hostile way, as being from another place (pp. 45–46).

The book's attempt to reveal the dichotomic representations of ethnic relations in Xinjiang is successfully achieved through the different topics addressed in its chapters. Additionally, the diversity of the contributions allows the reader to immerse themselves in the manifold expressions of ethnic identities being presented, and to obtain a nuanced picture of everyday identity negotiations in the multi-ethnic borderland of Xinjiang. Both the disciplines and the research methods for data gathering are diverse, and support this 'inside-out' perspective. The methods applied comprise ethnographic research, fieldwork, media analysis, historical analysis, statistics, and qualitative interviews.

As well as the merely implicit – rather than theoretical – engagement with 'place' and 'space' issues in the chapters, the book also lacks a deeper engagement with religion, despite it featuring prominently in the title: *Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest*. Although religion plays into most of the topics discussed, it would have been worthwhile to engage more with the intersectionality and mutual constitution of religion and ethnicity in Xinjiang, especially since many aspects of Uyghur identity are closely linked to religious practices and discourses. Nevertheless, aspects of religion are referred to in most of the chapters. Bellér-Hann mentions the disruption of everyday religious practices during the collectivisation period which wrought drastic changes to the everyday space and time rhythms of Uyghurs who, for example, were stopped from practicing their morning prayers (pp. 19–20). Smith Finley touches on the Han singer Dao Lang's lack of reference to local Muslim customs, despite the fact that he embraces many other aspects of Uyghur cultural identity. It would be interesting to know more about why religion as part of identity is so rigorously neglected by Dao Lang (p. 89). The deliberate omission of Muslim religion as a representation strategy is discussed in Chen's chapter, which explores how the Chinese media's positive image campaign using 'Uncle Kurban' and 'Brother Alim' to create sympathies for the Uyghur population downplays being Muslim and foregrounds other identity aspects, such as patriotic and nationalist activities (p. 113). The importance of Islam in everyday life is most pronounced in Grose's chapter. He emphasises the ambiguous role that religion plays in the lives of young graduates: while they are forbidden from participating in religious practices while studying in China proper (pp. 207–208), their return to Xinjiang is often interpreted as a kind of (re-)commitment to Islam, whose practice is easier to integrate into everyday life in Xinjiang when it comes to buying ritually pure food or finding prayer opportunities (p. 211). These different references

indicate the important role of religion in everyday identity boundary-making of the Uyghur population. Islam also plays a relevant role in international alliance building in wider political and cultural terms of the region's geopolitical setting. Religious practices connect Uyghurs to their Central Asian neighbours much more than to their Han colleagues, neighbours or friends. Therefore, the volume might have benefited from a more in-depth engagement with religion.

Despite the lack of a more profound discussion of linkages between the texts with regard to space, place and religion, all of the chapters provide a genuine insight into 'inside-out' perspectives of everyday life in Xinjiang, which is the core contribution of this volume to contemporary Xinjiang studies. Framed by the focus on the geopolitical importance of Xinjiang's borderlands and by the ethnic tensions within the area, this volume edited by Hayes and Clarke provides a thorough insight into a variety of issues related to everyday life as an inherent part of the geopolitical narratives of the region, and reveals the diverse ways that the population deals with power and identity politics. To conclude, the compilation undermines the premise that Xinjiang is no longer a far-away frontier region, but is firmly embedded within the rest of China, especially through migration movements, social networks, media communication, trade connections and political relations.

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